

SELOUS BLACK RHINO PROTECTION PROJECT

by John Gripper

The Selous Game Reserve lies in the south-eastern part of Tanzania and is the second largest game reserve in the world and a World Heritage Site. It is teeming with wildlife, including a few black rhino – but nobody knows how many!

The Selous Black Rhino Protection Project was set up to stop the black rhino from becoming extinct in the Selous. The project's work includes protecting the rhino that are left and determining the number of black rhino in the reserve and then developing a long term conservation and regeneration plan. The project is currently receiving part of its funding from the EC and also the Save the Rhino International, which is a trustee of the project.

For the last three years Friedrich Alpers has been the coordinator of this project with the help of 12 trained rangers from the Tanzanian Wildlife Division, who track the rhino for periods of seven to fourteen days in teams of four to six.

I visited the Kidai Ranger station, which is situated near the Sands Rivers Lodge, to see the progress of this research project. This station is well equipped and fully solar powered.

The rhino are very difficult to see in the thick bush and identification is from spoor, DNA dung samples and limited visual photography. Preliminary results indicate that so far 15 different individual rhino have been identified in only one sector (8 female, 7 male). DNA on dung sample extractions have been carried out by the University of Cape Town and footprint tracing techniques and night surveillance with digital video have been used to establish the rhino ID data base.



Since the project started no evidence of rhino poaching has been found, which is hugely encouraging and reflects the commitment and efforts of the team. However maintaining a highly visible anti-poaching presence continues to be a crucial deterrent.

With a new phase of EC funding scheduled to start in January 2004, the project is now expanding its



activities from the northern sector of the Selous to cover the entire reserve. This will allow expanded anti-poaching presence and help in gathering more robust data on rhino numbers in the Reserve. Being a non-profit making organization, the project relies entirely on donations and grants to survive and is constantly seeking new areas of funding to supplement existing grants and to ensure the long-term success of the project and the Selous rhino.